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Protect Short Lobsters by Widening Lath Spaces

D. G. Wilder

Protect short lobsters to protect your livelihood. During recent years thousands of lobsters have been tagged at several ports in each of the three Maritime provinces. The numbers of these tagged lobsters which have been recaptured show that in most of the canning areas the fishermen catch from one-half to three-quarters of the legal-sized lobsters during the two-month season. It is therefore obvious that the success of the fishery the following year depends to a large extent on the number of "shorts" which have been left on the grounds to grow.

Many of the short lobsters caught in narrow-spaced traps are killed or injured. The narrow-spaced traps now in general use catch millions of short lobsters every year. Frequently, these shorts are killed or injured through rough handling. Even with careful handling many die from exposure to wind and sunlight. At certain times of the year many of the shorts that are promptly returned to the water are probably eaten by cod and other fish as they settle to the bottom. These deaths and injuries are largely unnecessary and represent a direct loss to the fishermen.

To reduce this unnecessary loss you should widen the lath spaces of your traps and allow the shorts to escape alive and uninjured.

Tests with wide-spaced traps show that shorts can escape. During the past few years tests have been made at seventeen fishing ports to compare the catch from narrow-spaced and wide-spaced traps. In these experiments the narrow-spaced traps were those in regular use in the district and in all cases had lath spaces 1" or less in width. The wide-spaced traps had the laths carefully spaced at 1 1/4" or 1 3/8". All of these tests were made with the help of experienced, successful lobster fishermen and were carried on under actual fishing conditions. More than 53,000 lobsters were caught during this experimental fishing. The numbers of short (under 7" total length) and legal-sized lobsters caught in nine of these experiments in which 1 1/4" spaces were tested were as follows:

Port	No. of shorts caught		No. of legal-sized lobsters caught	
	1" spaces	1 1/4" spaces	1" spaces	1 1/4" spaces
Shediac, N. B.	230	111	531	640
Kouchibouguac, N. B.	1,260	540	860	833
Pt. Sapin, N. B.	1,438	600	443	437
Neguac, N. B.	66	47	237	262
Tignish, P. E. I.	809	523	586	699
Naufrage, P. E. I.	990	50	1,778	1,747
North Lake, P. E. I.	301	49	1,329	1,302
Souris, P. E. I.	571	332	1,535	1,627
Miminegash, P. E. I.	350	126	281	315
Totals	6,015	2,378	7,580	7,862

These experiments show that 1 1/4" lath spaces will, on the average, permit 60% of the shorts to escape without reducing the catch of legal-sized lobsters. In five of these experiments the wide-spaced traps caught more legal-sized lobsters.

Similar experiments showed that 1 3/8" spaces would allow up to 90% of the shorts to escape without reducing the total weight of legal-sized lobsters caught. It is, however, possible for some of the smallest legal-sized lobsters to escape through 1 3/8" spaces.

You should, therefore, protect your livelihood by spacing trap laths not closer than 1 1/4", allowing most of the shorts to escape without reducing your catch of legal-sized lobsters.

Other advantages of wide-spaced traps. In addition to permitting a large proportion of the short lobsters to escape, the wide-spaced traps catch fewer crabs, "snails," etc., and fewer lobsters are injured by jamming their claws between the laths. For these reasons wide-spaced traps can be overhauled much faster. New traps built with wide spaces throughout require fewer laths and less ballast, and are lighter and easier to haul. Old traps can be altered readily by widening only the lowest side space which is sufficient to permit the shorts to escape.

